

Montebello Hills Specific Plan

Home The Vision The Plan The Process News Stay Involved Cook Hill Properties

The Neighborhoods...

The residential neighborhoods planned for the proposed Montebello Hills Specific Plan will be designed to provide a range of homeownership opportunities to help meet the housing needs of the people of Montebello and other communities.

As proposed, the 1,200 new homes in the Specific Plan will be developed in five separate Planning Areas. The Specific Plan proposes the following:

- o Approximately 162 homes in Planning Area 1
- o Approximately 156 homes in Planning Area 2
- o Approximately 421 homes in Planning Area 3
- o Approximately 201 homes in Planning Area 4
- o Approximately 260 homes in Planning Area 5
- o A 6-acre community park in Planning Area 6

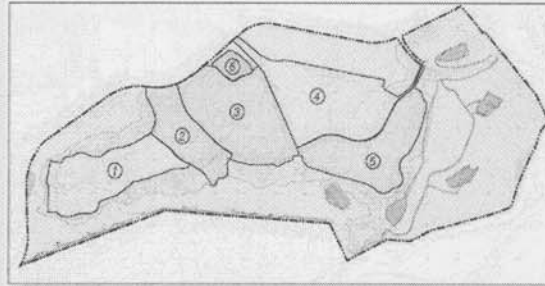
The Montebello Hills neighborhoods are proposed to be designed with orientations to open spaces and neighborhood parks easily accessed by pedestrian walkways and multi-purpose trails.

Single-family detached homes will feature diversity in style including conventional residences with street-facing garages, homes with rear-facing garages that create softer street scenes, as well as other varieties. Architectural styles are envisioned to represent the heritage of Early California with many European influences.

Other Montebello Hills neighborhoods may respond to the needs of first-time homeowners, young families and empty nesters with an array of townhomes, paired homes and luxury attached residences. No apartments are planned for the site.

While the exact density and mix of detached residences, townhomes and attached homes will

be determined by market conditions in the future, the Specific Plan has the ability to respond to Montebello's broad housing demands. The plan provides for a balance of neighborhoods and home types that welcome nearly every walk of life.



The residential neighborhoods within the proposed Montebello Hills Specific Plan will be developed in five separate planning areas. A sixth planning area is proposed for the development of a 6-acre public park.



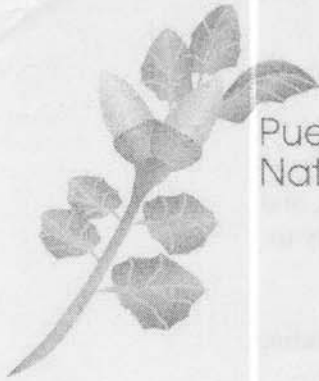
The single-family detached homes planned in the proposed Montebello Hills Specific Plan will include home types with street-facing garages (left) and residences with rear-loaded garages with alley access (right).



The single-family attached homes planned in the proposed Montebello Hills Specific Plan will include townhomes and luxury attached residences in varying configurations to create unique street scenes in each neighborhood.

Copyright © 2005 Cook Hill Properties, LLC. All rights reserved.

Privacy Statement



Puente Hills Landfill
Native Habitat Preservation Authority

March 27, 2008

Gilberto Ruiz
City of Montebello
1600 W. Beverly Blvd.
Montebello, CA 90640

**Notice of Preparation for Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)
Montebello Hills Specific Plan project (Cook Hills Properties)**

Dear Mr. Ruiz:

The Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority (Habitat Authority) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Montebello Hills Specific Plan project. The Habitat Authority was inadvertently omitted from the NOP distribution list. A letter from this agency was sent earlier in the month requesting a time extension for submitting comments. Thank you for your consideration of the following comments.

The Habitat Authority is a joint powers authority established pursuant to California Government Code Section 6500 *et seq.* with a Board of Directors consisting of the City of Whittier, County of Los Angeles, Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, and the Hacienda Heights Improvement Association. The mission of the Habitat Authority is to acquire, restore, and manage open space in the Puente Hills for preservation of the land in perpetuity, with the primary purpose to protect the biological diversity. Additionally, the agency will endeavor to provide opportunities for outdoor education and low-impact recreation. The Habitat Authority's jurisdiction extends within eastern Los Angeles County approximately from the intersection of the 605 and 60 Freeways in the west to Harbor Boulevard in the east.

The Habitat Authority requests that the DEIR consider impacts to lands this agency owns and/or manages. Overall, the Habitat Authority manages 3,860 acres of public open space just east of Whittier Narrows, directly across the San Gabriel River/ Rio Hondo from the Montebello Hills. Land managed by this agency is for biological preservation purposes. Together, these open space areas form a critical buffer of open space between the San Gabriel Valley and the coastal plain of Orange County, both of which have been converted to urban and residential land use. The Montebello Hills, together with the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area, represent perhaps the most important ecological reserve left on the floor of the Los Angeles Basin. The combination of habitats in close



proximity (coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak woodland, riparian, freshwater marsh), and the relatively large extent of these habitats makes this area an extremely high priority to local conservation and preservation groups, including the Habitat Authority.

Because many of the sensitive species of the Montebello Hills area are mobile (including birds such as the California Gnatcatcher), we consider these three areas ecologically linked, such that any impact to one may in turn impact the others. For this reason, we are greatly concerned about proposed development of a large portion of the Montebello Hills open space, and the resulting permanent loss of wildlife habitat.

The DEIR needs to include analysis regarding impacts to the federally-threatened California gnatcatcher. This species is now reduced in Los Angeles County to a few scattered pockets in the southern and eastern portion of the county. Estimates by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service have put the total number of gnatcatchers in the Montebello Hills at 30-50 pairs, making this arguably the most important "core" population for this species in the Los Angeles Basin; for this reason, it was included in its most recent designation of Critical Habitat. By contrast, the population in the western Puente Hills is fewer than 5 pairs, with scattered pairs along the southern flank of the eastern Puente and western Chino Hills now largely extirpated (since 1998) and seriously threatened by surrounding land uses. In addition, this bird has been spotted in and around the Montebello Hills area, a possible indication of its mobility to larger habitat areas such as the Puente Hills. The DEIR needs to include study results from protocol surveys, and address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for impacts to this bird population.

The DEIR needs address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for impacts to other protected animal species known from the Montebello Hills including birds such as the Cactus Wren (taxonomy under review but coastal Calif. populations appear to be similar and distinct from interior birds, and therefore listed as a California Species of Special Concern) and the White-tailed Kite (listed as Calif. Fully-protected). The Cactus Wren is seriously imperiled in the Los Angeles, with scattered remnant populations in the eastern San Gabriel foothills, the San Jose Hills, the Whittier Hills and the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The population in the Baldwin Hills disappeared in the 1990s, and those along Big Tujunga Wash and the San Gabriel River Wash are tiny and may be nearing extirpation. The White-tailed Kite may no longer nest regularly in the Los Angeles Basin, but Whittier Narrows adjacent to the Montebello Hills was one of its final breeding areas.

The DEIR needs address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for impacts to additional California Species of Special Concern possibly present (though un-surveyed). These include the Burrowing Owl, mammals like the San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit, American badger, San Diego desert woodrat, Coast horned lizard, California legless-lizard, rosy boa, San Bernardino ringneck snake, and coast patchnose snake. All of these species are scarce or extirpated from scrubland habitats on the floor of the Los Angeles Basin, but may be extant in the Montebello Hills. Jackrabbits were last seen in the

Whittier Narrows area in the early 1990s, and horned lizards were present through the 1970s.

The Montebello Hills provide important habitat for regionally-scarce wildlife species that are not on any protected list, but are nonetheless extremely rare now in the Los Angeles area, as a result of the transformation of basin habitats into urban uses. These include birds such as the Greater Roadrunner, reptiles like the coachwhip, amphibians like the garden slender-salamander, and others. The DEIR needs address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for impacts to these species as well.

The DEIR needs address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for impacts to plants including the coastal sage scrub community. The large expanse of coastal sage scrub, and the high level of endemism and rarity of coastal sage scrub species point to the need for immediate surveys at appropriate times of year (April – June) and after winters with decent rainfall (e.g., 2008).

The DEIR needs address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for impacts to, the ecological connections between the Montebello Hills and the Rio Hondo/ Whittier Narrows. These connections are critical linkages that must be maintained, and should be enhanced. Currently, wildlife mortality along the few roads separating these areas (incl. Lincoln Ave.) is extremely high, and proposed development would likely drive more animals east toward the Narrows, and could even both “pull” certain scavenging species up from the river into the hills, resulting in further roadkills, and continuing the degradation of the ecological connections between the two areas.

Additionally The DEIR needs address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for impacts to the Puente Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor which spans from the Whittier Narrows, through the Habitat Authority’s jurisdiction, through the Chino Hills State Park and connects with the Cleveland National Forest. The DEIR needs to provide analysis regarding cumulative impacts of the proposed increase in urbanization on the regional natural environment

The DEIR needs to address how the project will avoid, minimize or mitigate for urban edge impacts from residential development on the CA Gnatcatcher, especially potential impacts from house cats, as well as impacts to all wildlife. The Habitat Authority recommends that an educational flyer for residents about living with all types of wildlife be a part of the conditions for development. Consideration should be given to installing six foot high fences in all backyards that abut open space to minimize human/wildlife interactions. The ground below the fences would also need something such as chicken wire installed in order to keep native wildlife such as coyotes from digging under the fences. In addition to fencing, voluntary trails originating from the development should be prohibited to reduce further habitat fragmentation of the area.

The Habitat Authority found the NOP unusually brief, and therefore, problematic in presenting complete comments for items to be included in the DEIR.

The DEIR needs to include various alternatives including a no project alternative, and one with a reduced project footprint. The DEIR should include various design alternatives including one that maintains an adequate ecological reserve for the California gnatcatcher with clustered housing to enhance ecological connections between regional open space areas. This reserve should not be a part of the fuel modification zone for structures or roads.

Please add us to the mailing list for the DEIR when it is made available for public review. Thank you for your consideration of our comments. Feel free to contact Andrea Gullo, Executive Director, at (562) 945-9003 for further discussion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bob Henderson", is written over a faint, illegible typed name.

Bob Henderson
Chairman

Cc: Board of Directors, Habitat Authority
Citizens Technical Advisory Committee, Habitat Authority
Belinda Faustinos, RMC

(May 9) Whittier Daily News.

Project plans aired at forum

Montebello Hills may get 1,000 homes

Sandra T. Molina Staff Writer

MONTEBELLO - About 50 local residents showed up Tuesday for the latest in a series of meetings by the owners and prospective developers of one of the last prime pieces of open space left in Los Angeles County.

It involves about 480 acres of raw land in the Montebello Hills.

Officials from Plains Exploration and Production Co., owners of the land, presented the latest information on the proposed development of the property, located on the northern tip of the city.

The meeting, held at the Holy Cross Armenian Apostolic Cathedral's center, was one in a series of meetings to inform neighborhoods surrounding the land of the plans. There will be at least a half dozen more meetings.

"We are in the very beginning of the planning," said Norman Witt, senior vice president of Cook Hill Properties, LLC - the developer hired by PXP.

"We are making the best decisions based on science and what is in the best interest of the city," said Susan Lindquist, community development director for Cook Hill.

Witt told residents the project would not infringe on their lifestyles. He said the natural and manufactured open spaces will serve as buffers.

"There will be buffer zones in excess of 300 to 1,000 square feet from all neighborhoods," Witt said.

Mark Rogers of TRG Land, a hillside planning and design company, said all of the details of the project have not been completed yet.

Early marketing studies by Cook Hill have found that single-family detached homes would be the most profitable for the city.

Rogers said estimates of the proposed 1,000 residential units that PXP plans to build on the property will generate anywhere from \$5 million to \$7 million annually in redevelopment revenues.

The market prices for the homes, depending on their size, are estimated to range from \$400,000 to \$2 million, Witt said.

There will be no affordable housing as part of the project because the city has an excess of

affordable housing, he added.

"There are other places in the city for \ housing," he said.

Residents expressed concern about increased traffic that the new homes would generate.

"I question the traffic study that's been presented," said Linda Strong, co-chair of the Save the Montebello Hills Sierra Club Task Force. "We have gridlock now. There's going to be more on San Gabriel Boulevard, which will upset people in Rosemead."

Witt said that a revised traffic study is under way.

The additional families, Strong said, will have school-aged children who will have a major impact on local schools that are already overcrowded.

The development does not include new schools, Witt said. But, developers are in talks with the local school districts to mitigate the affect on the schools.

Another topic discussed was the fate of the gnatcatcher - a bird that is on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species list - and inhabits the hills that sit atop the northern end of the city.

Coastal sage, which is on the natural habitat of the species, is part of the development.

Rogers, who has done work before involving the gnatcatcher, said that the project includes language that will protect the bird in perpetuity.

Currently, there are anywhere from 26 to 60 pairs of gnatcatchers on the property, he said.

"It's not all about the birds," Strong said. "This is one of the last open space for us to enjoy and it should be saved primarily for Montebello residents and our neighbors."

Another member of the task force, Michael W. Popoff, who lives one block south of the hills, said he was not as opposed to the project as he thought he would be before the meeting began.

"This is all new information," he said. " I have to think about it."

sandra.molina@sgvn.com